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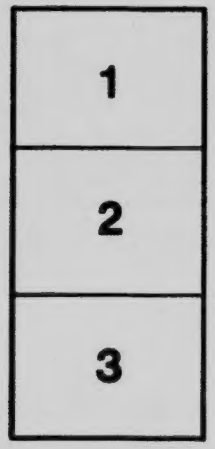

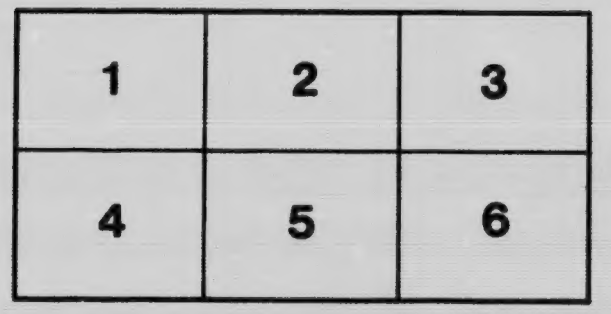

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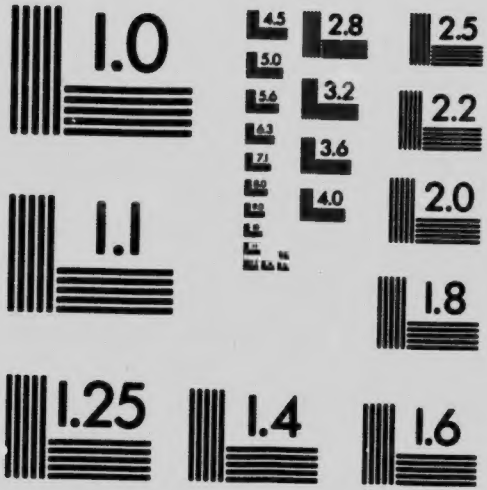

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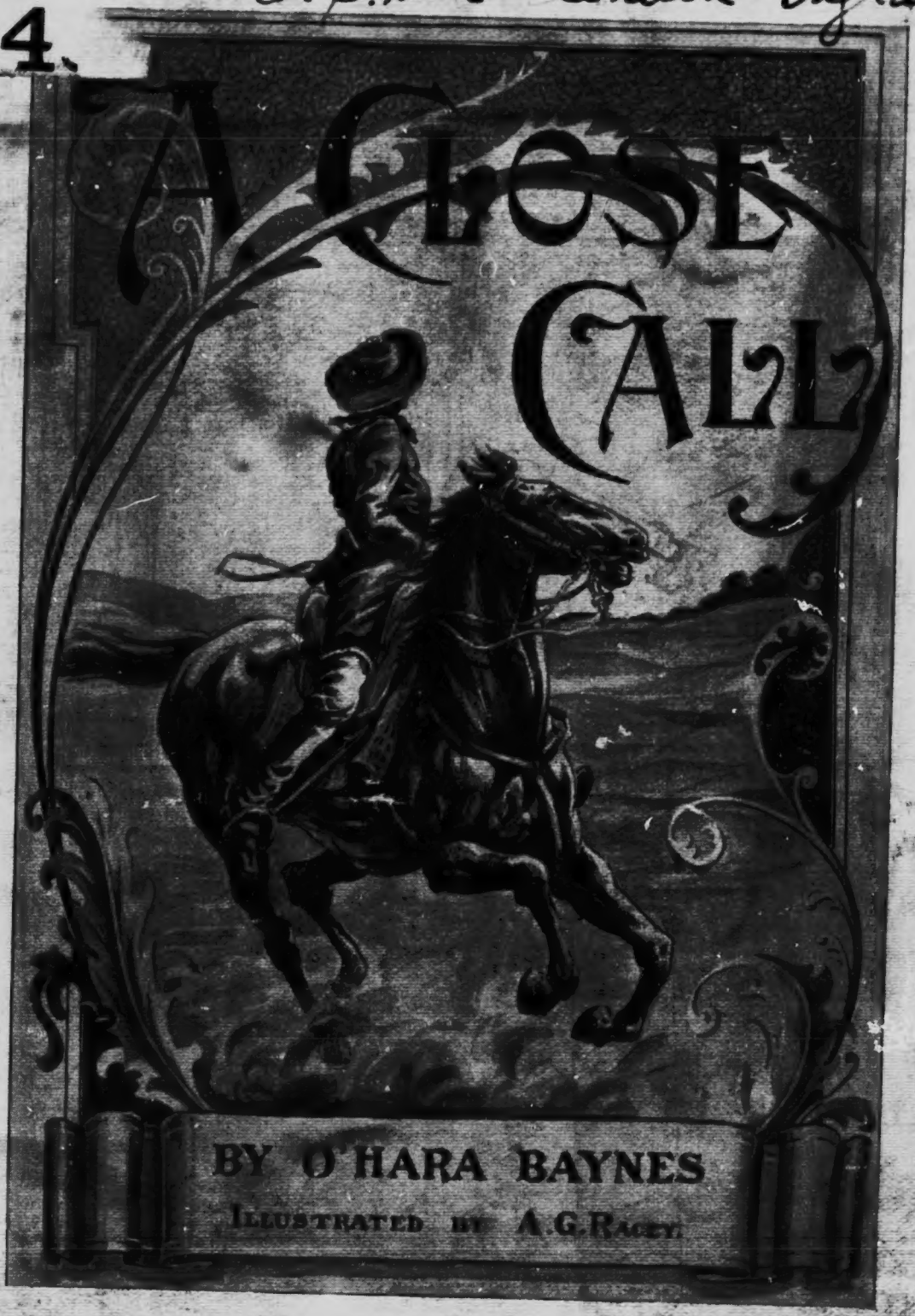
4.

A Close Call



BY O'HARA BAYNES

ILLUSTRATED BY A. G. RAGEY.

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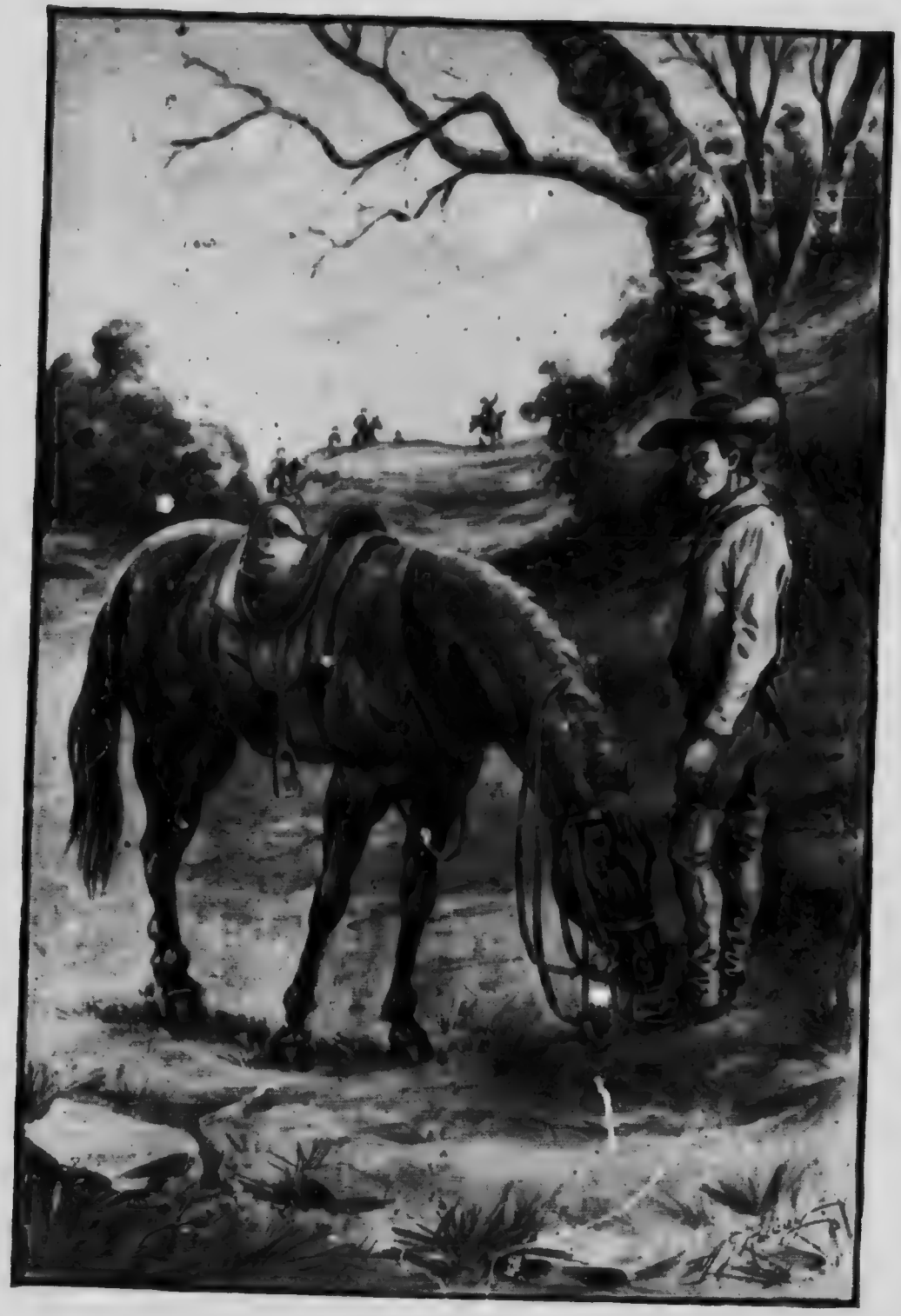
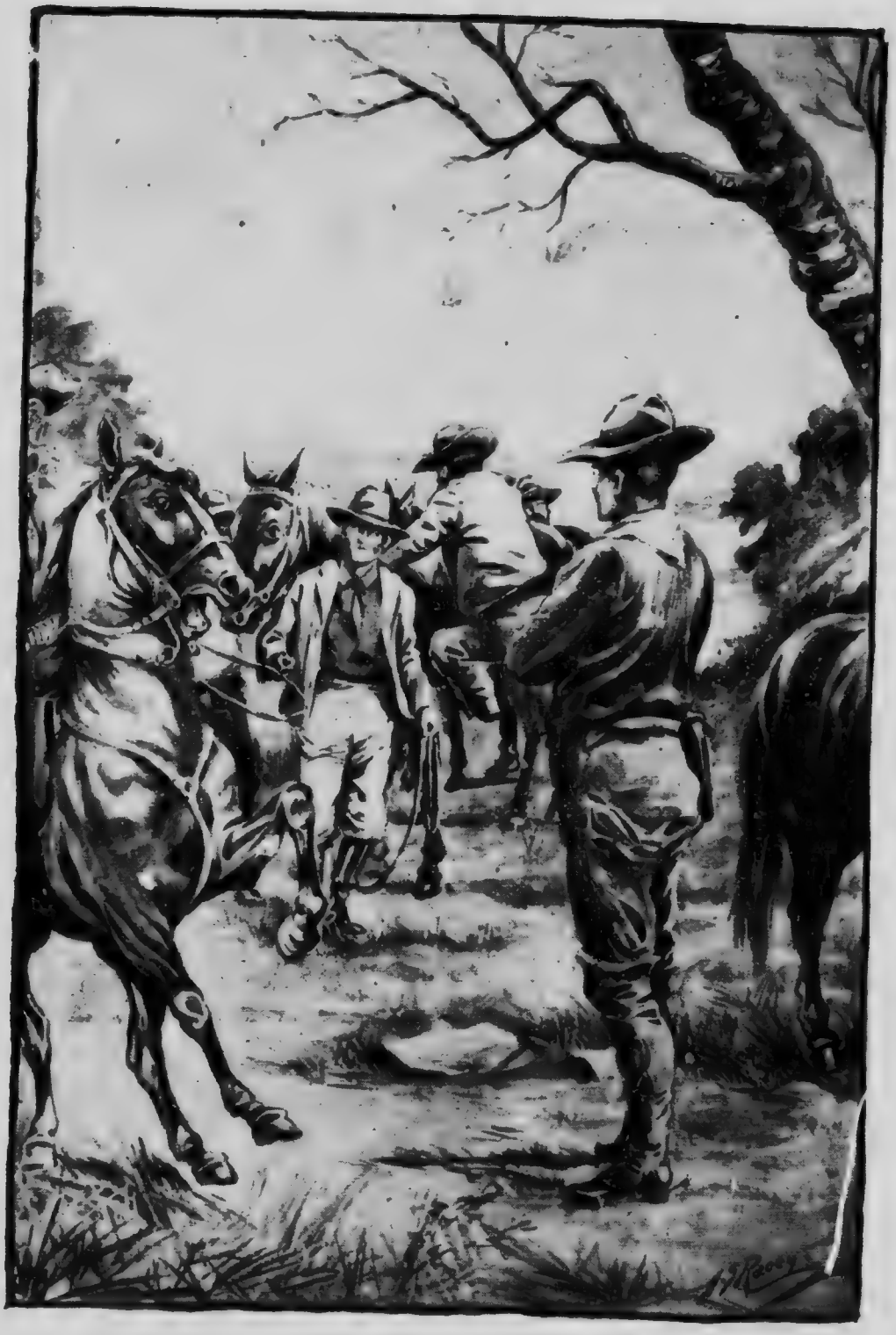
I'll tell you in verse a short story I read,
And I feel in my heart it is true;
For though by their passions men often are led,
Compassion's a stranger to few,

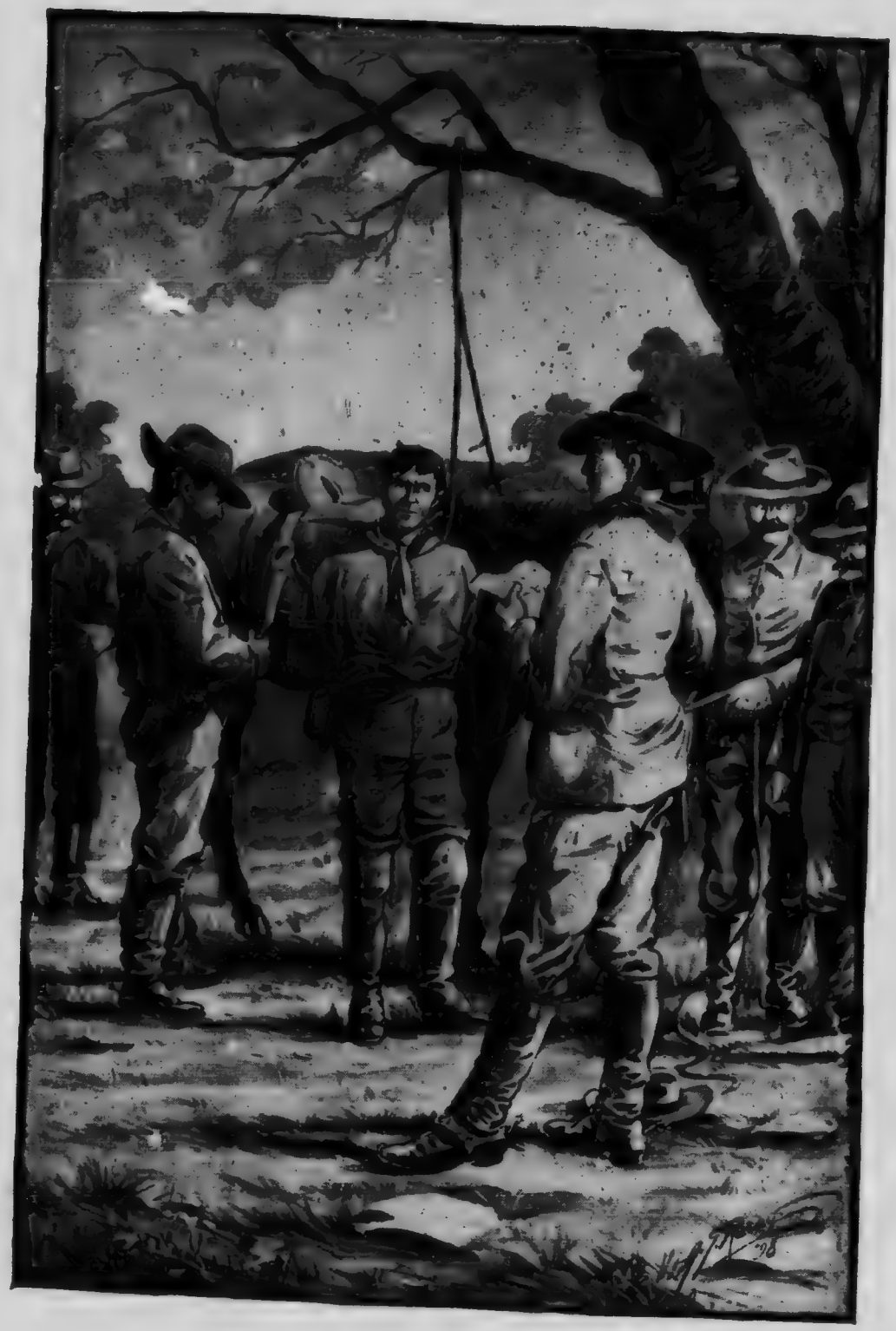
A Close Call



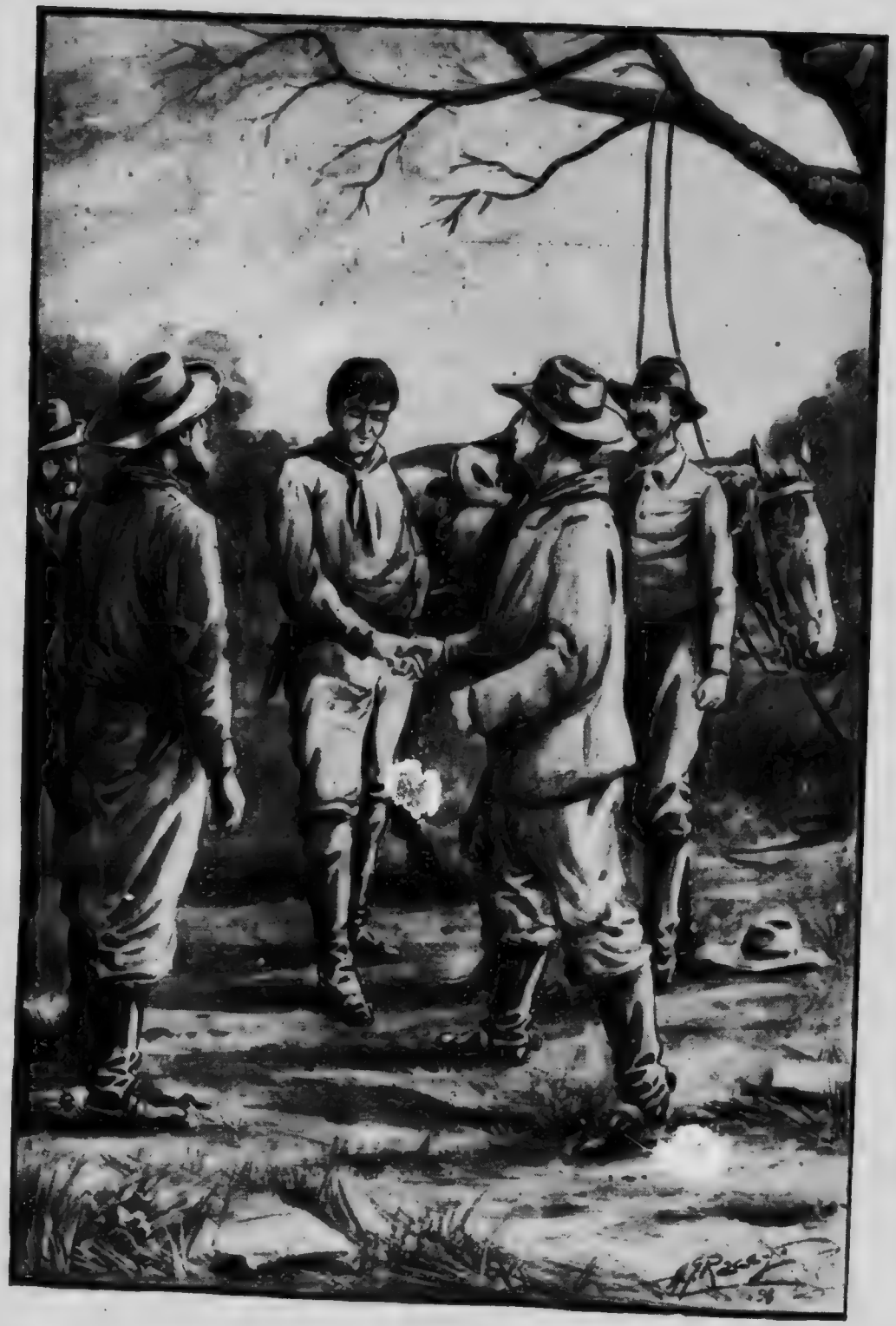
"BROKE down, old hoss! dead winded!
Wa'll that's mighty bad for me,
For as sure as the sun is over our head
I'll be hung to yon blasted tree.
Here they come! over that hillock.
Four—or—five—I can't rightly tell,
Yes, five—and I havn't a cartridge.
But perhaps it's just as well.
Old hoss! You're a pretty good one!
But you've got me into a scrape.
I should have know'd on a half-bred screw
I couldn't have made my escape.
If it hadn't aben for that letter
I'd a stuck to the ranche for a while,
And with 'poker' and 'faro' amanaged
To skin those blokes of their pile:
But that letter near drove me crazy
And I made up my mind I'd go,
And I thought this brute was good enough,
But he's turned out rather slow.
But I knew what I was adoin',
You can shoot a man in a row;
But 'out west' it's somewhat different
To steal a hoss or a cow.
Here they are! Wa'll boys, good mornin'.
I thought you was runnin' a race,
Ain't you skeered to spile the hosses
Aridin' at such a pace?"
"Wa'll, stranger!" said one of the riders,
As he sprang from his sweating steed,
"When we've finished with you, the hosses
Can take all the rest they need.



We was lookin', if you'll believe us,
For a Broncho that's strayed away,
A buckskin with one white stockin',
Have you seen such a nag to-day ? "
" Yes, I think I hev, was he branded
With a triangle and a D ?
I found him lookin' lonely,
And brought him along with me."
" Now, stranger, that was kind of you,
Ah ! thar he is under that tree,
And from his back, my buck, you'll take
A jump to eternity.
Just think ! a tree quite handy !
Yov've picked the spot to a charm,
And you'll find the view quite lovely
When strung to that upper arm.
Come boys ! we can't stand foolin'
Around here all day long,
Just fling a lariat over that branch,
And tie his arms with a thong.
I reckon we've got a necktie
Will fit your neck right slick ;
We'll wait five minutes to let you pray,
And try to cheat Old Nick."
" Wa'll I ain't much good at prayin',
But seein' you are so kind,
I've a letter here in my pocket
You might read if you feel inclined.
I'd kind o' like to hear it
Once more before I go,
'Twill do me more good than prayin'
Tho' I could pray, long ago ;



And that letter's from her as taught me
To pray both night and morn
At her knee. Ah! how much better
For her had I ne'er been born!
So if any of you will do me
This favor, I'd take it kind.
But if it's too much trouble,
We'll call it squar, don't mind."
"I'll read it," says one of the party,
And he drew the letter forth,
"Yes, Jim will read it handy,
He's had schoolin' way up north."
So Jim began the letter.
As he read his eyes grew dim,
And his voice got rather husky—
He'd a tender heart had Jim.
The letter was short, but it seemed
To the men, who listened to him,
To tell of years, when even hope
To the writer had grown dim.
It told of a widowed mother,
Who, hoping 'gainst hope for years,
Had prayed to God to save her son—
And here Jim saw the tears
Come trickling down the prisoner's face,
But as he wept, he smiled,
And his bronzed face grew, in the morning light,
Like the face of a little child.
"Oh, Jack! my son!" the letter ran,
"They say I'm sinking fast!
Oh! let me see my boy's dear face
Before my life has past.



Until I hold your hand once more,
And kiss your lips, and give
My blessing to my erring son,
I pray to God to live.
I'll wait—I'll watch! you'll surely come!
But should you fail, I'll know
That death himself hath stepped between!
And say, 'God willed it so.'"
The men who held the lariat's end
Here dropped it, and one said:
"I had a mother, whom I loved,
And tho' she's long since dead,
For her dear sake, I'll let you go,
The hoss belonged to me.
Take him, and git: what say you, boys,
Don't you with me agree?
The cuss was tryin' to get back—
Dead strapped, and down at heel,
And if we'd strung him up, I'll bet
We'd not aheard him squeel,"
"Yes, let him go!" here Jim stepped up,
And cut the thongs in twain,
And loosed the rope from round his neck,
And set him free again.
Then pressing in his hand a roll,
"Now, blarme my heart! you're broke,
Here's all I've got, 'twill take you home."
He squeezed Jim's hand, and spoke:
"*A durn close call*," then with a sob,
"Mother! you've saved your son!
And sure as God's in heaven above,
He'll prove a better one."

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